



A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the Connecticut General Assembly

Testimony of

Connecticut Commission on Aging

Aging Committee

March 6, 2012

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and comment on HB 5336.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan state agency devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For almost twenty years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities. I'd like to thank this committee for its ongoing leadership and collaboration in these efforts.

H.B. No. 5336 (RAISED) AN ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION

~ CoA Supports

Helping people stay in their homes and communities as they age is at the center of our work at the CoA. The Legislature and the Governor have shown their commitment to the same. The Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP) is a core program in supporting older adults in the community. It provides adequate nutrition critical to health, quality of life and overall functioning to older adults via congregate and home delivered meals statewide. Another important aspect of the home delivered meal is that it provides a daily **visit** to the older adult who is homebound to offer a little socialization, a personal touch, and a visual check on their general well-being.

The ENP is primarily funded by federal and state dollars and partially funded by suggested contributions from participants and private donations. For the past several years, overall funding has been tenuous. While federal and state funds have remained flat, individual voluntary donations for each meal and private donations have decreased as result of this prolonged troubled economy. Unfortunately, flat funding translates into a decrease as the costs associated with this program keep rising markedly (e.g. food, fuel, maintenance of vehicles).

As a direct result, elderly nutrition providers are now forced to utilize a variety of approaches in response such as - putting caps on the number of meals served at sites, closing sites one or two days a week and not offering home delivered meals on weekends. It is important to note that unfortunately, it is a difficult cycle (a conundrum) ~ when fewer meals are served statewide, less money comes in from the federal government (as the federal government reimburses the state based on the number of meals served).

Clearly, the demand for the ENP will increase in concert with the soaring population of older adults and the major movement to keep people in their homes and communities... and at the same time aging baby boomers will have different preferences.

Several years of level funding of the Elderly Nutrition Program have stressed the system so it can no longer meet the needs of the communities – and certainly not in the same way it historically has.

In light of these changing times and to maximize state and federal resources, the CoA strongly and respectfully recommends that the state assess all the food security programs in Connecticut and implement a modernization plan. This will be no easy task as the U.S. government administers food-related programs by various agencies with different funding streams and requirements. Consequently, coordination is limited and states are challenged to address broad goals.

Clearly, the State Unit on Aging (the administrator of ENP program) at the CT Department of Social Services would be a key contributor among a multi-disciplinary group stakeholders. The CoA offers its partnership with this most worthwhile endeavor – to bridge gaps and identify ways to address interconnected issues and improve the food system – and to secure the future of the Elderly Nutrition Program.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We look forward to our continued work with you.

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